

Better economic times coming?

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By Gordon Wilczynski, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

County business survey is optimistic.

A group of Macomb County leaders were given a glimpse of the future at a meeting Thursday of the Macomb County Chamber Alliance.

Most were happy at what they heard.

Wayne Oehmke, executive director of the Sterling Heights Regional Chamber of Commerce, said the economy is getting better. He said compared with last year, the economy is looking up as evidenced by comments made by businesses in Macomb County who have been struggling during a less than favorable economy.



Macomb Daily staff photos by Craig Gaffield

The meeting was held at the Sterling Heights Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Sterling Heights in conjunction with Oakland University, Macomb Community College and Macomb County Planning and Economic Development Department.

It was moderated by Al Lorenzo, former president of Macomb Community College who currently is executive in residence at Oakland University.

Lorenzo said 465 business people responded to the survey in June for the second time. The prior survey results were made public six months ago and they were not favorable.

He said the respondents to the survey gave their opinions what the second half of 2010 will bring.

Lorenzo said 47 percent of the people answering the survey believe general business conditions will improve in Macomb County, up 32.7 percent from January.

"Most businesses also will begin to stabilize in the last half of this year with nearly half of them improving by the end of the year," Lorenzo said. "

The survey showed that pay rates are not likely to increase at most businesses during the second half of 2010 and there is likely to be continuing downward pressure on fringes benefits.

Overall, business owners said they are either uncertain or skeptical about the benefits of health care reform. Only 15 percent said they plan to take advantage of the proposed tax credits.

Business owners said a limited availability of credit is likely to be available for smaller businesses.

Eighty percent of business owners said they have a definite preference for buying locally.

The business owners recommended that the county should reexamine and reaffirm its target industry programs to achieve a greater alignment of purpose for economic development and revitalization initiatives.

Business owners said they are not projecting a significant increase in hiring. Unemployment levels are likely to be well above historic rates, said Lorenzo.

The survey also indicated that the reorganization of county government following the election of the county's first executive should give economic development and business advocacy a high priority within its new structure.

Lisa Edwards, executive director of the Anchor Bay Chamber of Commerce said except for low employment figures, the outlook for the second half of 2010 is good.

"I'm a positive person so it's good to see a positive outlook," Edwards said.

Lorenzo said he is glad to see a "high level" of optimism. He said he thinks the worst is over.

"If you are in business, half of them (surveyed) have been there for 20 years or more, you are talking to people who know what they're doing," Lorenzo said. "They have an uncanny way to anticipate the future."

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